

Exodus 17

Israel has been gone from Egypt for about a month and they are traveling to Mount Sinai. Two major events happen in this chapter: God provides water for Israel from a rock (17:1-7) and Israel fights against Amalek (17:8-16).

TRANSLATION - 17:1-6:

1 And all the assembly of the sons of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin by stages at the mouth of Jehovah and they camped at Rephidim and there was not water for the people to drink. **2** So the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water and we will drink." And Moses said to them, "Why are you quarreling with me? Why are you testing Jehovah?"

3 Then the people thirsted there for water and the people complained against Moses and said, "What [is] this? You have brought us from Egypt to kill me and my son and my cattle with thirst?"

4 And Moses cried to Jehovah saying, "What will I do with this people? Yet a little [more] and they will stone me!"

5 And Jehovah said to Moses, "Cross before the people and take with you elders of Israel and your staff with which you struck the Nile. Take [it] in your hand and go. **6** Behold Me standing before you there, against the rock of Horeb and you will strike the rock and there will go up from it water and the people will drink." And Moses did thus before the eyes of the elders of Israel.

7 And it was called there the place Massah and Meribah because the sons of Israel quarreled and tested Jehovah, saying, "Is not Jehovah among us or not?"

HEBREW WORDS:

"To journey" (ver. 1) was used earlier at 12:37. "Assembly" was used earlier at 12:3, 6, 19, 47. "To camp" was used earlier at 13:20. "To quarrel" (ver. 2) is used 72 times in the OT; in Exodus only at 17:2, 7; 21:18; 23:2-3, 6. "To drink" was used earlier at 7:18, 21, 24. "To test" was used earlier at 15:25; 16:4. "To quarrel" (ver. 3) was used earlier at 15:24; 16:2, 7-8. "To bring up" is also translated often "to offer" (a sacrifice). It was used earlier at 1:10. "To cry out" (ver. 4) was used earlier at 5:8, 15. "To stone" is used 22 times in the OT; in Exodus, at 8:26; 17:4; 19:13; 21:28-29, 32.

"To cross over" (ver. 5) was used earlier at 12:12, 23. "Elders" was used earlier at 3:16, 18. "To strike" was used earlier at 2:11-13. "Rock" (ver. 6) is used 73 times in the OT, in Exodus here and 33:21-22.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

"Rephidim" (ver. 1) is used 5 times in the OT: Exo. 17:1, 8; 19:2; Num. 33:14-15. Scholars do not know exactly where Rephidim is located. "Horeb" (ver. 6) was found earlier at 3:1, the site where God spoke to Moses from the burning bush. "Massah" (ver. 7) is found 5 times: Exo. 17:7; Deut. 6:16; 9:22; 33:8; Psalms 95:8. The word "Meribah" is related to the word for "to quarrel." The letters "ribah" spell "to quarrel" in Hebrew. The town is found 11 times: Exo. 17:7; Num. 20:13, 24; 27:14; Deut. 32:51; 33:8; Ezek. 47:19; 48:28; Psalms 81:7; 95:8; 106:32.

COMMENTARY:

God led Israel "by stages" on the way from Goshen to Mount Sinai. The Hebrew text says this guidance was by the "mouth" of Jehovah, which is understood to be His commands. This illustrates that the words coming out of the mouth of Jehovah God are not suggestions or opinions. On the way to Mount Sinai, Israel camped at Rephidim. But there was no water there, the second time Israel has lacked access to water (15:23-25). In this text, they quarrel with Moses (as they did extensively in 16:1-12) and called on Moses to give them water to drink.

This is now the fourth time Israel has quarreled with Moses: 5:21; 14:11-12; 15:23-24; 16:2-3. Moses pointed out to them that they weren't quarreling with him but with Jehovah. In fact, they were "testing" Jehovah God (ver. 2). God had tested them earlier (15:25) to see if they would trust and obey God. For Israel (or us today) to test God implies that we have certain expectations of God and we are putting Him into a position to meet those expectations. Of course, it is not possible to do that with God (see Matt. 4:7; James 1:13).

As the people thirsted for water, they complain against Moses (ver. 3) and accuse him of bringing them out of Egypt to kill them, their children (literally "sons") and cattle. Their accusation is not logical, but when people are hurting and scared, they do not reason correctly. Moses goes to Jehovah in prayer (ver. 4) and asks what he is to do since Israel seems to want to stone him to death.

Finally, Jehovah responds to Moses (note that on this occasion Jehovah is not going to punish Israel for their fear). Jehovah commands Moses to pass through the people and take some of their older, wiser leaders ("elders") with him and the staff with which he had struck the Nile River (see 7:14-25). God will make Himself available and present (perhaps in the "pillar of cloud;" see 13:21-22) near the "rock of Horeb." "Horeb" has some relationship with Mount Sinai (see comments at 3:1). Against this specific rock, Moses is to strike with the staff and there would flow from it water so that the people could drink. Moses did so (ver. 6) and God provided water for this multitude of people! What a remarkable miracle to add to those which Jehovah God has already done!

In addition to the name "Rephidim," Israel also called the place "Massah," a play on the Hebrew word for "test" (see 17:2, 7) and "Meribah," a play on the word "quarrel." At the end of verse 7 we see that Israel was questioning God's presence among them. God proved their fear ill-founded.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - Israel, in fact, tested God on many occasions on their way to the Promised Land: Numbers 14:22-23. In Deuteronomy 6:16, Moses commands Israel not to test Jehovah God as they did at Massah (see also 8:15; 9:22; 33:8). Israel will engage in a similar incident recorded in Numbers 20:1-13. On that occasion, Moses will sin against Jehovah so that he is not allowed to enter the Promised Land.

Later Jewish writers - The psalmist will reflect on this event in Psalm 95:7-9 and encourage his audience not to follow the same example of disbelief which results in disobedience. See also Psalm 78; Isaiah 48:21; Psalm 114:8. God's people threaten to stone other leaders also: 1 Sam. 30:6; 1 Kings 22:18.

NT writers - The apostle Paul will allude to the disobedience of Israel in 1 Corinthians 10:3-6 where he encourages Christians not to follow the same example of disbelief and disobedience. Paul will state in that context (10:4) that Christ is the Rock which provided the water. Clearly Paul uses the rock as a metaphor for the Son of God. Jesus existed before He came to earth and provided for His (God's) people in the wilderness, through water from a rock. In the same way, Jesus will provide for the spiritual needs of His people today. To state Jesus is the Rock (cf. Matt. 16:16-18) is to equate Jesus with Jehovah God who was considered the Rock in the OT: Gen. 49:24; Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 30-31.

The Hebrew writer will do the same, reflecting more Psalm 95 than Exodus 17, in chapters 3-4. Satan tested Jesus in Luke 4:1-13 (see also Matt. 4:5-7), where Jesus informed Satan that he could not and should not test Jehovah God. Jesus, unlike Israel, passed the test.

God's people also desire to stone Christ (John 10:31), Stephen (Acts 7:58), and Paul (Acts 14:19).

TRANSLATION - 17:8-14:

8 And Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim. **9** And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men and go up. Fight against Amalek tomorrow. I, myself, am standing on the pinnacle of the hill and the staff of God [will be] in my hand." **10** And Joshua did just as Moses

said to him, to fight against Amalek and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the pinnacle of the hill.

11 And it was that just as Moses raised his hand that Israel prevailed and just as he rested his hand, Amalek prevailed. **12** And the hands of Moses [were] heavy and they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it and Aaron and Hur grasped his hands from this one and from this one and it was his hands were supported until the sun came. **13** And Joshua defeated Amalek and his people by the edge of the sword. **14** And Jehovah said to Moses, "Write this [as] a memorial in a book and put [it] in the ears of Joshua that to wipe, I will wipe the memory of Amalek from under the heavens."

HEBREW WORDS:

"To fight" (ver. 8) was used earlier at 1:10. "Joshua" (ver. 9) is mentioned 227 times in the OT. This is his first mention. He will be found again in Exodus at 24:13; 32:17; 33:11. He will be mentioned 168 times in the book which bears his name. There is yet another man named "Joshua" in the OT: Zechariah 3:1 and other passages. "To choose" is used 172 times in the OT, in Exodus at 17:9; 18:25. The verb "to stand" is used earlier at 2:4. "Hill" is used only here in Exodus, out of 42 times. "Hur" (ver. 10) is mentioned 16 times in the OT.

"To raise" (ver. 11) was used earlier at 7:20. "To prevail" is related to the word "hill." This verb was used at the flood of Noah's day in Genesis 7:18-20, 24. This is its only occurrence in Exodus, out of 25 times. "To appease" or "to rest" was used earlier at 10:14. "Heavy" (ver. 12) was used earlier at 4:10. "Stone" is found earlier at 1:16. "To grasp" is used only here in Exodus, out of 21 times. "Support" is found only here in Exodus, out of 49 times. "Sun" was used earlier at 16:21. The verb "to defeat" is used only three times: Exo. 17:13; Isa. 14:12; Job 14:10.

"To write" (ver. 14) is used in Exodus 11 times, 225 times in the OT. "Memorial" is found earlier at 12:14. "Book" was used earlier at Genesis 5:1. It is used 191 times in the OT, four times in Exodus: 17:14; 24:7; 32:32-33. "To wipe" is used 34 times in the OT, three times in Exodus: 17:14; 32:32-33. "Memory" is used earlier at 3:15.

HEBREW GRAMMAR:

"To wipe I will wipe" (ver. 14) is using the Hebrew emphatic construction, the infinitive absolute and the imperfect form of the same verb.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

"Amalek" (ver. 8) was found in Genesis 36:12, 16. They are descendants of Esau. The nation is found 39 times in the OT, only here in Exodus. It is found most densely in 1 Samuel 15. For more on Amalek and their relationship to Israel, see: Numbers 14:44-45; Judges 3:12-13; 6:3-6; 7:12; 10:12; 1 Sam. 14:48; 15:1ff; 28:18; 30:18; 2 Sam. 1:1. Esther's enemy, Haman, seems to have been an Amalekite: Esther 3:1; see also 1 Sam. 15:8.

Joshua, whose name was Hoshea before Moses changed it (Num. 13:16), was from the tribe of Ephraim (Exo. 33:11; Num. 13:8; 1 Chron. 7:26-27; Num. 1:10; 2:18; Joshua 24:30). "Joshua" is related to the word for "salvation," and it means "Jehovah saves." Joshua will take over the leadership of Israel from Moses (Exo. 24:13; 33:11; Num. 11:28; 13:16; 27:15-23). Hur appears to have been the grandfather of Bezalel (Exo. 31:2).

COMMENTARY:

A nation in the Arabian peninsula which descended from Esau (see above under "Archaeology"), making them Israel's distant cousins were the Amalekites. They came up and attacked Israel's weakest members (see the discussion at Deut. 25:17-19) in an attack that was apparently unprovoked. It is easy to imagine Amalek was concerned about water and / or pastureage or perhaps even caravan routes with the large nation of Israel moving through.

Moses told Joshua to choose men and go fight Amalek (ver. 9). Joshua surely did not study military science while he was in Egypt! His knowledge came from the Holy Spirit in him

(see Deut. 34:9). This experience will help prepare Joshua for assuming the leadership of Israel once they come to the Jordan River and must invade the Promised Land (Joshua 1:1-3); this story is told in the book of Joshua. While Joshua fought with Amalek, Moses, Hur, and Aaron went up on a hill with the staff of God in his hand (ver. 9-10).

When Moses held his hand, with its staff, toward the sky, Israel and Joshua would prevail in their battle against Amalek (ver. 11); yet it is hard to keep one's hand held upward for a long time. Moses' hand tired and he lowered it. Consequently, Amalek's forces would prevail. So, Aaron and Hur took a stone on which Moses could sit and allowed him to sit down (ver. 12). Then the two men held up Moses' hands through the rest of the day so that Israel and Joshua could prevail. God generally required 2-3 witnesses for a crime to be prosecuted (Deut. 19:15). In this case, God used three men as witnesses to the power of God in the victory He gave Israel over Amalek. In this way, Israel would know that the victory was not theirs; it was God's.

Following the victory, Jehovah told Moses to write the event "as a memorial" in a book (probably a leather scroll) and "put it in the ears of Joshua" so he would always remember the power of faithfulness to Jehovah God. In fact, Jehovah promised that He would certainly "wipe out" the memory of Amalek from under the heavens (ver. 14). Today, Amalek no longer exists as a nation.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - Moses will give details about this event in Deuteronomy 25:17-19.

TRANSLATION - 17:15-16:

15 And Moses built an altar and called its name "Jehovah is my banner." **16** And he said, "Surely the hand [is] against the throne of Jehovah; war of Jehovah [will be] against Amalek from generation to generation."

HEBREW WORDS:

"To build" (ver. 15) was used earlier at 1:11. This is the first "altar" mentioned in Exodus. One was found 13 times in Genesis. The word is used 59 times in Exodus; it is related to the word "to sacrifice." The word is used 403 times in the OT. "Banner" is used only here in Exodus, mostly in Isaiah (10 times), out of 21 times. The name "Jehovah" is the shortened, poetic form, which we saw earlier at 15:2. "War" is used earlier at 1:10.

REFERENCES (REFERIRI) AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

The patriarchs built altars in Genesis 12:7-8; 13:18; 26:25; 35:1, 7.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

"Banners" (ver. 15) were often decorated with the religious symbols of the peoples' respective gods. The patriarchs built altars and gave them names in Genesis: 33:20; 35:7. It will also happen in Judges 6:24.

COMMENTARY:

Also following the victory, Moses built an altar, the first reference to such action in the book of Exodus. He worshipped Jehovah God there, giving thanks for the victory. He named the altar, or better said he named the God Whom he worshipped at the altar: "Jehovah is my banner." Banners were used in combat to rally the troops together; they often bore the insignia of various gods. Here, Moses uses the banner as a metaphor for Jehovah God. *He* is Israel's banner.

Moses emphasizes the wrath and holiness of Jehovah God by stating that the hand of Amalek is against the "throne" of Jehovah God, indicating war from generation to generation. We do not know exactly where the record of this battle was first written. Some suggest it was

the book of the wars of Jehovah God (Num. 21:14). But really, there is no reason why it could not have been recorded in the book which eventually became the book of Exodus, which was added to that work which had been penned already, the book of Genesis.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - If God could conquer Amalek through the raised staff of Moses, then He can conquer the nations of Canaan (the Promised Land) through the leadership of Joshua. Israel just needs to trust and obey Jehovah God. After wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, Moses will remind Israel of their defeat of Amalek in Deuteronomy 25:17-19. Joshua and Caleb will be members of the spies who search that land of Canaan before Israel moves in (Num. 13:16; 14:6, 30, 38). Joshua will take the leadership from Moses (Num. 27:18; Deut. 1:38) and will then write (we assume) the book which bears his name. So dedicated was Joshua to the law of the Lord that Israel was faithful to God throughout Joshua's lifetime as well as the second generation of Israelites (Joshua 24:31).

For further references to "writing" in the book of Exodus, see 24:4, 12; 32:16, 32; 34:1, 27-28.

NT writers - While Jesus did not have this account in mind when He makes the statement, in John 3:14-15, He pictures Himself almost as a "banner" as He hangs on the cross for the sins of mankind.